9

SOME CONSIDERATIONS About the CASE OF SCANDAL, OR Giving Offence TO Weak Brethren.

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Of giving OFFENCE TO Weak Brethren.

IT hath been often obſerved concerning our *Diſſenting Brethren*, that when they are urged to mention any one thing required of the People in the Publick Worſhip of God in our Pariſh Churches, judged by them abſolutely ſinful, on the account of which their ſeparation from us is neceſſary, and conſequently juſtifiable, they either put us off with ſome inconveniencies, inexpediences or corruptions, as they call them ſome things appointed and uſed, which in their opinion render our ſervice leſs pure and ſpiritual; (the chief of which exceptions have been conſidered in ſeveral Diſcourſes, lately written with great temper and judgment for the ſatisfaction of all honeſt and teachable minds:) Or elſe ſome of them tell us, that they are indeed themſelves ſufficiently perſwaded of the lawfulneſs of all that is enjoyned, they do not ſee but a good Chriſtian may ſerve God acceptably and devoutly our way, and may go to Heaven living and dying in our Communion; but then there are

many other Godly, but weaker Christians of another perſwaſion, with whom they have been long joyned: And ſhould they now, at leaſt totally, forſake them, and conform, they ſhould thereby give great offence to all thoſe tender Conſciences, which are not thus convinced of the lawfulneſs of holding ſuch Communion with our Church, in Prayers and Sacraments, as is by Law required. Which is a ſin ſo Heinous and of ſuch dreadful Conſequence, that our *Saviour* tells us, St. *Matt.* 18.6. *Whoſoever ſhall offend one of theſe little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a Milſtone were hanged about his Neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the Sea*; and in St. *Pauls* account it is no leſs than Spiritual Murther, *a deſtroying of him for whom Chriſt dyed*, Rom 14. 15.

Now this Caſe of *giving Offence to weak Brethren*, I have undertaken briefly to conſider, where I once for all ſuppoſe (as all thoſe muſt do who make this the ground of their refuſing to Communicate with our Church) that nothing is amongſt us impoſed as a condition of Communion, but what may be done without ſin; for were any thing in it ſelf ſinful required by our Church, there could be no room for this Plea of *Scandal:* That alone would be ſufficient reaſon for Separation from us. I Diſcourſe therefore at this preſent only with ſuch, who for their own particular could well enough joyn with us, but dare not do it for fear of *Offending* thoſe, who yet ſcruple and are diſſatisfied at the uſe of our Prayers and Ceremonies.

Nor do I deſign exactly to handle the whole Doctrine of *Scandal*, or Elaborately explain all the places of Scripture concerning it, or ſtate the Caſes there treated of; Nor ſhall I now meddle with the Duty of Governours and Superiours, how far they ought to condeſcend to the weakneſs, ignorance, prejudices,

prejudices and miſtakes of thoſe under their care and charge; but I ſhall confine my ſelf to this one Queſtion.

Whether there doth lye any obligation upon any private Chriſtian (as the caſe now ſtands amongſt us) to abſent from his Pariſh Church, or to forbear the uſe of the Forms of Prayer and Ceremonies by Law appointed, for fear of Offending or Scandalizing his weak Brethren?

Here I ſhall Firſt of all inquire, what is the true notion of a *weak Brother*. Secondly, What it is to *Offend* ſuch an one. Thirdly, How far and in what inſtances we are bound to conſider the *weakneſs* of our *Brother*.

Firſt, For the reſolution of this Queſtion it is neceſſary to know, what is the true notion of a *weak Brother*. Now a *weak Brother* or *weak in Faith* in Scripture denotes one newly converted to Chriſtianity; and ſo neither thorowly inſtructed in the principles, nor well ſetled in the practice of it, the ſame whom our *Saviour* calls *a little one*, and the *Apoſtle a babe in Chriſt*. 1 Cor. 3. 1.

Converſion to Chriſtianity is often called our new birth, and conſequently at Mens firſt entrance into the Chriſtian Church, they were for a while reckoned as in an Infant ſtate; and accordingly were to be moſt tenderly handled and nurſed, and gently uſed, with all favour and indulgence, not driven faſter than they were able to go; till by degrees, by the improvement of their knowledge they came *to be of full Age*, as the *Apoſtle* expreſſeth it, *Heb.* 5. 14.

They were at firſt to be fed with Milk, to be taught the eaſieſt and plaineſt Doctrines, againſt which leaſt exceptions could be made; (as our Bleſſed *Saviour* himſelf would not at firſt tell his Diſciples of the ſhame and ſufferings he was to undergo, and when he

did ſpeak of them it was covertly and obſcurely, ſo that they did not perfectly underſtand him, leſt they ſhould by it have been preſently diſcouraged and tempted to have forſaken him; no unneceſſary burdens were to be laid upon them, which might render their new Profeſſion grievous to them; every Stumbling-block and prejudice was to be removed out of their way, that might occaſion their falling; the grown Chriſtians and proficients were Charitably to condeſcend to the capacity of theſe Novices, and make allowances, and for a time bear with their Ignorance and many miſtakes and Childiſh humours, and deny themſelves their own Liberty, and become even as Children with them, as if themſelves were of the ſame mind and underſtood no better, than theſe raw beginners.

Now theſe freſh Diſciples, little ones or Babes are the ſame with thoſe St. *Paul Rom.* 14. calls *weak Brethren*, weak for want of Age or Growth, or as the Original word rather ſignifies, Sickly and Feeble; like a Man beginning to recover from a waſting Diſeaſe, his diſtemper, tho cured, yet hangs a long time upon him, the Dregs of it ſtill remain: He muſt for a while be carefully attended and watched, ſince every little thing diſcompoſes him, and hazards a relapſe. So was it with theſe firſt Converts. As ſoon as ever they were brought to acknowledg Jeſus to be the Son of God, and were willing to become his Diſciples, they were immediately Baptized, tho as yet they underſtood but little of the Nature or deſign of the Goſpel. The Apoſtles and firſt Preachers of our Religion were in haſt to make more Proſelytes, and therefore preſently Baptized all that were willing to it without that previous Inſtruction and Preparation, which afterwards, when Churches were ſetled, was made neceſſary before Heathens or Jews could be admitted by

Baptiſm.

Baptiſm. Thus the ſame day the Apoſtles Preached Chriſt to the Jews, *Acts* 2. they Baptized about three thouſand of them, and *Philip* without any delay Baptized the *Eunuch*, as ſoon as he profeſſed to believe that Jeſus was the Son of God: and the Jaylor and his Houſehold were Baptized the ſame hour at midnight, at which *Paul* and *Silas* ſpake unto them the word of the Lord. After their Baptiſm they were to be tutor'd and train'd up in their new Religion, where great care was to be taken, great prudence and caution uſed towards them, leſt they ſhould ſuddenly flie back and repent of their change; for having been bred up, and ſo long lived Jews or Gentiles, and then of a ſudden turn'd Chriſtians, they retain'd ſtill a great love and kindneſs for many of their old Cuſtoms and Opinions, they had mighty and inveterate prejudices to overcome, the Old man was by degrees to be put off, and therefore they were at firſt treated with all the tenderneſs and condeſcenſion imaginable, the ſtronger and wiſer Chriſtians would not ſtand rigidly on any little matters, would for the preſent tolerate many things, which were neceſſary afterwards to be done away, hoping that in time they might be better taught, and be brought off thoſe miſtakes they now Labour'd under.

Had the Apoſtles in the beginning plainly told all the Jews of the ceaſing of their Laws, the abrogation of their Ceremonies and Worſhip, the no neceſſity of Circumciſion, the taking in of the Gentiles, they would never have born ſuch Doctrines, they would never have become Chriſtians upon ſuch terms, nor ever endured thoſe Teachers, who ſeem'd to make ſo little account of *Moſes* and their Temple. Now to gain theſe St. *Paul* became *weak* himſelf, tied up himſelf while amongſt theſe Jewiſh Converts to ſuch obſer-

ſervances, which he was really free from, as if he had the ſame doubts and were of the ſame opinion with thoſe *weak* Chriſtians, and adviſes all others who did underſtand their Liberty, yet to oblige their Brethren by the ſame inoffenſive carriage.

This then was the difference between the *ſtrong* and the *weak*, the *ſtrong* were the well-grounded, underſtanding Chriſtians, that knew it was lawful for them to Eat all kind of Meats, that Chriſt had ſet them free from the burdenſome Yoke of the Jewiſh Ceremonies, *the weak*, tho Brethren, that is, believers in Chriſt, yet abſtained from ſome Meats, judging them unlawful or unclean, and obſerved days, and Zealouſly retained the Moſaical rites, not being yet ſufficiently inſtructed in that Liberty our Saviour had purchaſed for them, or in the nature of his Kingdom, which *conſiſted not in Meat or Drink, but in Righteouſneſs and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghoſt.* Hence I obſerve,

1. That the rules which are laid down in Scripture concerning *weak Brethren* principally reſpect thoſe times when our Religion made its firſt appearance in the World, and were temporary proviſions for the eaſier proſelyting men to the Faith of Chriſt, or the better ſecuring and fixing thoſe that were already come into the Church. They are not ſtanding Laws equally obliging all Chriſtians in all Ages, but were ſuited to the Infant ſtate of the Church, or rather to its condition whilſt it was but an Embryo, till Churches were formed and ſetled, and our Chriſtianity had got firm Footing and Poſſeſſion in the World. Thus St. *Paul* tells us, 1 Cor. 9. 19. *For tho I be free from all Men, yet have I made my ſelf ſervant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the Law, as under the Law, that I might gain them that*

that are under the Law. To them that are without Law, as without Law (being not without Law to God, but under the Law to Chriſt) that I might gain them that are without Law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means ſave ſome. And this I do for the Goſpels ſake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. This was the Apoſtles deſign in all theſe Compliances and Civilities to win many to the Faith of Chriſt, by theſe wiſe arts to inſinuate himſelf and his Doctrine into them: but when he had once made his way, he then taught them another leſſon, and behaved himſelf after a far different manner. Now to do as St. *Paul* did, would always be the duty and wiſdom of one in his circumſtances, who had his office and was to propagate any Religion amongſt Heathens and Infidels; like a Maſter that dealeth not ſo ſharply with his Scholar at his firſt entrance into the School, as he thinketh fit to do afterwards. But the directions St. *Paul* gave, and according to which himſelf practis'd at the firſt planting of Chriſtianity, do no more agree with our times, wherein Chriſtianity is become the National Religion, countenanced by the Civil Laws and Authority, and ſo generally profeſſed by every one amongſt us, that we hardly know of any other Religion, than the ſame Cloaths we did wear in our Infancy would ſerve us now when we are of full Age.

We ought indeed to be very careful of Children, and lead them by ſtrings, and remove every ſtraw and rub out of their way, leſt they ſtumble and fall, but it is ridiculous to uſe the ſame care towards grown men. None of us Labour under thoſe prejudices the firſt Chriſtians did, who forſook a Religion in which they had been bred, and long lived; and as to the Jews had left a way of Worſhip commanded them by God himſelf,

himself, confirmed to them by many Miracles and Wonders, delivered to them from their Fathers by a constant succession of Prophets sent from God. There is not now amongst us any such competition between two Religions, but every one learneth Christianity as he doth his Mothers Tongue. The Apostles therefore and Governours of the Church carried themselves towards these new Converts, as God Almighty did towards the Children of *Israel*, when he brought them first out of *Ægypt*. He for a while led them by a Pillar of Fire and of a Cloud, gave them Water out of the Rock, and rain'd down Bread and Flesh from Heaven. This he did for them whilest in their passage, thus extraordinarily provide for them, and in some cases even humour that People, lest upon every little pretence they should return back to the Garlick and Onyons of *Ægypt*; but after they were setled in the Land of *Canaan*, he then left them in their own hands, by ordinary Common means to take care of and provide for themselves, he did not shew the same indulgence to them, as he did whilst they were in the Wilderness.

St. *Paul* would not take that reward that was due to him for Preaching the Gospel, but himself Laboured hard night and day, because he would not be chargeable to his Converts, 1 *Thess.* 2. 9. and this he did *for the furtherance of the Gospel*, that all might see he did not serve his own Belly. But surely our Dissenting Brethren do not think themselves obliged by this Example, in places where Publick maintenance is setled on Ministers by Law, to refuse to take it, and earn their own Bread by some manual occupation, tho thereby they avoid giving offence to Quakers, and those who call them hirelings, and say they prophesie only for filthy lucre.

Thus

Thus it is uſually obſerved, that St. *Paul* writes quite after a different manner to the Romans and to the Galatians, tho upon the ſame ſubject. In his Epiſtle to the Romans amongſt whom he had never yet been, he pitieth and pleadeth for the *weak Chriſtians*, chargeth that they ſhould not be deſpiſed or caſt off, that no cauſe of offence ſhould be given them, but to the Galatians a People that had been fully inſtructed in the nature of their Chriſtian Liberty, amongſt whom himſelf had planted the Goſpel, and had been preſent in perſon, and ſo knew that they underſtood better; when ſome of them fell into the ſame Error, thinking Circumciſion and the obſervation of the Moſaical Law neceſſary to Chriſtians, he chides them ſharply and rebukes them more ſeverely; *Who hath bewitched you O fooliſh* Galatians, *&c.* He who would condeſcend to the Ignorant Novices amongſt the Romans, would not in the leaſt comply with the Galatians, that had or ought to have had more knowledge and light: and afterwards when the reaſon of ſuch forbearance ceaſed, when the nation of the Jews had rejected Chriſt, and the *Gentile* world was come into the Church, the obſervation of the Moſaical Law, and the diſtinction of meats contained therein, was ſo far from being tolerated in thoſe, whether Jews or Gentiles, who through miſtake thought themſelves obliged to it, that it was condemned by the Rules and Canons of the Church. The ſum of all this is, that whatever Argument may be drawn from St. *Paul's* diſcourſes about *weak Brethren* by way of Analogy, or Similitude, or Parity of reaſon, yet there are no ſuch *weak* perſons now amongſt us, as thoſe were for whom the Apoſtle provideth, or as thoſe *little ones* were, for whom our Saviour was ſo much concerned.

2*ly*, I would desire our Dissenting Brethren to consider by what pretence they can challenge any privilege belonging to them under the notion of *weak Christians*, when according to their own opinion and conceit of themselves, they are of all men furthest off from being such in any sense. This is as if a man worth a Thousand pound *per annum*, should Sue in *formâ pauperis*.

They who take upon themselves to be teachers of others, wiser and better than their Neighbours, the only Sober and Godly party, and are too apt to despise all other Christians as Ignorant or Prophane, with what colour of reason can they plead for any favour to be shewn, or regard to be had to them in complyance with their *weakness*? Tho they love to argue against us from the example of St. *Pauls* condescension to the uninstructed Jews or Gentiles, yet it is apparent that they do not in other cases willingly liken themselves to those *weak* believers, or *Babes in Christ*. They have really better thoughts of themselves, and would be Leaders and Masters in *Israel*, and prescribe to their Governours and give Laws to all others, and do prefer their own private opinion (which they call their Conscience) before the Judgment of the wisest men, or the determinations of their Lawful Superiours. And if in all instances we should deal with them as *weak* persons, turn them back to their Primmer, advise them to learn their Catechism, they would think themselves highly wrong'd and injured.

If the several Dissenters amongst us did in good earnest look upon themselves as *weak*, that is, Ignorant, Wavering, half Christians, did they think their dislike of the Constitutions of our Church to be the effect of such *weakness*, they would be either more careful to hide it, or would more diligently seek out for remedy;

remedy; they would be more modeſt and humble, not ſo forward to judge and condemn what they do not underſtand; they would not encourage one another to hold out and perſiſt in this their *weakneſs*, nor breed up their Children in it, nor ſo Zealouſly endeavour to inſtil the ſame prejudices and miſtakes into all with whom they converſe. But the truth is, they ordinarily look upon their oppoſition to the orders of our Church as the effect of an higher illumination, greater knowledg than other Men have attained unto, they rather count us the *weak* Chriſtians, if ſome of them will allow us ſo much; for otherwiſe if they do not take us for the weaker and worſe Chriſtians; Why do they ſeparate from us? Why do they aſſociate and combine together into diſtinct Congregations, as being purer, more ſelect Chriſtians than others? Now tho ſuch perſons as theſe may be in truth very *weak*, of little judgment or goodneſs, notwithſtanding this conceit of themſelves and their party, yet theſe are not by any means to plead for indulgence under that Character, nor to expect we ſhould forgo our juſt Liberty to pleaſe and humour them.

And that this is nothing but the plain truth is ſufficiently evident from this one obſervation, that many amongſt them will grant our Reformation to have been very excellent and laudable for thoſe days of Darkneſs and Ignorance wherein it was firſt made: But we now, ſay they, ſee by a clearer light, have greater knowledge, and have arrived to higher perfection, and ſo diſcover and cannot bear thoſe faults and defects, which before were tolerable. Now who doth not ſee that theſe two pleas are utterly inconſiſtent and deſtructive of one another? to deſire abatement of the Ceremonies, and abolition or alteration of the Liturgy in complyance with their *weakneſs*, and to de-

mand the ſame becauſe of the greater knowledg and light they now enjoy, above that Age wherein this preſent Conſtitution of our Church was eſtabliſhed. This ſhews they will be either *weak* or *ſtrong* according as it beſt ſuites with the Argument they are managing againſt us; they are contented to be reckoned as *weak*, only that on it they may ground a plauſible objection againſt us.

3 Thoſe who are really *weak*, that is, Ignorant and injudicious, are to be born withal only for a time, till they have received better inſtruction. We cannot be always *Babes in Chriſt*, without our own groſs fault and neglect; he is ſomething worſe than a *weak* man who is ſond of, and reſolutely againſt all means of Conviction perſiſts in his Ignorance and miſtake. The caſe of young beginners and Novices is very pittiable, who have not been taught their leſſon, but the ſame condeſcenſion is not due to thoſe, who are *ever learning and yet are never able to come to the knowledg of the truth*, not for want of capacity to underſtand, but for want of humility and willingneſs to be inſtructed. Such who are peeviſh and ſtubborn, whoſe Ignorance and Error is Voluntary and affected, who will not yield to the cleareſt reaſon, if it be againſt their intereſt or their party, can upon no account claim the priviledges of *weak* perſons.

It is a great piece of inhumanity and cruelty to put a ſtumbling-block in the way of a blind man, but he walks at his own peril, who hath eyes and will not be perſuaded to open them, that he might ſee and chooſe his way. Thus our *Saviour* anſwered his Diſciples when they told him that the *Phariſees were offended at his Doctrine, Let them alone, they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both ſhall fall into the Ditch*, St. Matt. 15. 14. They were

were reſolved not to be ſatisfied with any thing our Saviour ſaid or did, they watched for an advantage and ſought occaſion againſt him. It was their Malice, not their Ignorance, that made them ſo apt to be *offended*. Of theſe therefore our Saviour had no regard, who were ſo unreaſonable and obſtinate in their oppoſition.

Not that I would be ſo uncharitable as to condemn all, or the generality of our Nonconforming Brethren for malicious and wilful in their diſſent from us. God forbid that I ſhould paſs ſuch an unmerciful ſentence on ſo many (as I believe) well meaning, tho miſerably abuſed perſons, to their own Maſter they ſtand or fall. But however,

1. I would out of charity to them beg earneſtly of them, that they would thorowly examine whether they have Conſcientiouſly uſed all due means in their power for information of their judgments concerning thoſe things they doubt of; whether they have ſincerely endeavoured to ſatisfie themſelves, and have devoutly Pray'd to God to free their minds from all prejudices and corrupt affections, and have patiently conſidered the grounds and reaſons of their Separation from us; for unleſs it be thus really with them, their *weakneſs* is no more to be pitied, than that mans Sickneſs, who might be cured by an eaſie remedy if he would but vouchſafe to apply it, or would ſubmit to good Counſel.

2. I muſt ſay that old and inveterate miſtakes, that have been a thouſand times anſwered and proteſted againſt, are not much to be heeded by us. If people will by no means be prevailed upon, having ſufficient light and time allowed them, to lay aſide their Childiſh apprehenſions and ſuſpicions, they can hardly be thought to deſerve that compaſſion and tenderneſs

derneſs St. *Paul* preſcribes towards *weak Brethren*. I ſhall give one plain inſtance. Let us ſuppoſe that at the firſt Reformation of Religion amongſt us ſome very *weak* (and ſuch they muſt be if honeſt) were *offended* at the Church's requiring Kneeling at the receiving the Sacrament of the Lords Supper, as ſeeming to them to imply the adoration of the Bread and Wine, and as likely to harden ſome Ignorant People in that monſtrous conceit of Tranſubſtantiation: But now after ſo many publick Declarations made by our Church, wherein ſhe avows that no ſuch thing is intended, after the conſtant profeſſion of ſo many, that have uſed that decent Ceremony, that they abhor the Doctrine of Chriſts bodily preſence, nay after the couragious ſufferings, even death it ſelf, of thoſe that firſt Eſtabliſhed this Reformation, rather than they would worſhip the *Heſt*; if after all this, people ſhall ſtill clamour againſt this geſture as Popiſh, and be offended with thoſe that uſe it, as if thereby they gave divine honour to the Elements, all that I ſhall ſay is this, it is a great ſign that it is not infirmity only, to which condeſcenſion is due, but ſomething worſe that raiſeth and maintaineth ſuch exceptions and *offences*.

This I ſuppoſe holds true even in things where the *offence* ariſeth from their doubtful or ſuſpicious nature, that are capable of being miſunderſtood and abuſed, and may be apt through miſtake to provoke or tempt others to evil. Yet if there be no moral evil in them, and the doing of them is of ſome conſiderable conſequence or advantage to me, I am bound to forbear them no longer, than till I have taken due care to inform others rightly of the matter, and warn them of the danger, till I have endeavoured to rectifie their judgments concerning the innocency of my action and intention, and given them notice of the evil that

might

might possibly by my action happen to them. If I dig a pit, or lay a block in the way, whereby others not knowing any thing of it are hurt and wounded, here I stand chargeable with it, and am guilty in causing them to fall; but if they are plainly and often told of it, and being forewarned yet will run into the danger, they are then only to thank themselves, and it is purely their own fault. Now if it be thus in cases that are liable to suspicion and misinterpretation, it holds much more in our Ceremonies and the orders of our Church, where the *offence* that is taken at them ariseth not so muchfrom the nature of the injunctions, as from mens gross Ignorance, misconceit or perverseness. Thus men are no longer *weak* in Scripture sense, than they are inculpably Ignorant, or which is all one, thePlea of *weakness* is gone, after that sufficient instruction hath been given or offered to them, and other allowances made according to mens different capacities of understanding. This shall suffice for the first thing propounded, to shew what is the true notion of a *weak Brother*.

2. I proceed to give you an account what it is to *offend* such an one. Because I write for the use of the Common people only, I shall not trouble them with the several significations of the *Greek* word which is Translated *Scandal* or *offence*, nor distinctly consider the several places of Scripture where it is used, only so far as plainly to shew, First, that people are generally mistaken in the sense they have of it. Secondly, What it is truly to **offend** or **give offence.**

1. That people are generally mistaken about the sense of *offending* or *giving offence*. For by it they commonly understand displeasing or grieving another, and making him angry with them, and so consequently they think themselves in Conscience bound to forbear all those things, which godly persons do not like or approve

approve of, or is contrary to their fancy and judgment. It is notorious, that moſt of the ordinary ſort of *Diſſenters*, who aſſign this as the reaſon of their not conforming to the Eſtabliſhed Laws of the Church, becauſe by doing ſo they ſhall *offend* their Brethren, mean nothing elſe by it, but that they ſhall fall into diſgrace with, incur the diſpleaſure and provoke the anger of thoſe, with whom they have held Communion for a long time in religious exerciſes. They, good men, will be mightily troubled and vexed to ſee or hear ſuch a ſad thing, and this is taken by many amongſt them for an heinous crime, even the ſame which St. *Paul* calls *Scandalizing a weak Brother*, to do any thing which may chance to put any of their Godly Brethren out of humour.

The occaſion of this falſe apprehenſion is in all likelyhood the Ambiguity of our *Engliſh* word *offend*, which is uſed in the Tranſlation of our Bibles. In our Language it ſignifies to diſpleaſe, or to do ſomething which another diſlikes; but the *Greek* word, which is ſo rendered, ſignifies to lay a ſtumbling block in the way of another, which cauſes him to fall, or to enſnare and deceive him into ſomething that is evil, as I ſhall ſhew more largely preſently. We muſt not therefore interpret the places of Scripture, where *offend* or *offence* are found, by the common importance of the words amongſt us, but by the undoubted ſignification of the Original word, which all learned men agree to have quite another ſenſe.

It muſt not be concealed that there is one place in the famous fourteenth chapter of the *Romans* that ſeems to favour this popular conceit *v.* 15. *If thy Brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkeſt thou not charitably*, and it is the only one I know of that ſounds this way, but ſurely it is more reaſonable, that this

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one verſe ſhould be interpreted by all the other places of Scripture about this matter, than all the reſt explained agreeably to this ſingle verſe. Nay it ſufficiently appears that by *grieving* our Brother, is not meant diſpleaſing him, or making him ſorry or ſad, but wounding or hurting him, and ſo it is uſed to denote, that which cauſes grief or ſorrow. For in the very next words it follows, *deſtroy not him with thy meat for whom Chriſt died*; and what is here expreſſed by *grieving* is *v.* 13. called, *putting a ſtumbling-block or an occaſion to fall*, and *v.* 21. *it is good neither to eat Fleſh, nor drink Wine, nor any thing whereby thy Brother ſtumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak*; all which ſignifie the ſame with being *grieved*. To be *offended* or *grieved* is not to be troubled at what another hath done out of pity and concern for his Soul, but to receive hurt our ſelves from it, being by it drawn or deceived into ſome ſin, and our own fall occaſioned by what our Brother hath done, is that which creates the grief and trouble. But becauſe this miſtake doth ſo generally prevail amongſt many, as I hope, well diſpoſed people, who think that they muſt not do any thing, at which good men are diſpleaſed or grieved, I ſhall offer theſe few things to their conſideration.

1. That thus to cenſure and condemn the actions, and to be diſpleaſed and angry with the perſons of thoſe that differ from them, or refuſe any longer to joyn with them in their Separate Congregations, is a great inſtance of peeviſhneſs and uncharitableneſs, and is that very ſin which *St. Paul* often warns his *weak* believers againſt, *viz.* that they ſhould not raſhly judge thoſe who knew their duty, and underſtood their Chriſtian liberty better than themſelves. This ſeems to be the ſame with that Argument the Papiſts uſe

to perſwade men into, or to keep them in their Communion, as the ſafeſt way to Heaven; ſince they ſo confidently damn all Men, whom, tho never ſo unjuſtly, they thruſt out of their Church. Becauſe ſome of our *Diſſenting Brethren* are ſo froward and unmerciful in their cenſures, and ſo fond of their own way, as to brand all that return to the Church with the infamous names of Apoſtates, Time-ſervers, Men that have made Shipwrack of Faith and a good Conſcience, and have forſaken Chriſt for fear of Perſecution, and the like, therefore all thoſe, who are convinced of the lawfulneſs of Conformity, yet ought ſtill to continue with them in their Separation, leſt they provoke and irritate their anger and diſpleaſure againſt them; and thus any company of men, that ſhall joyn together and reſolve to quarrel with all that do not as they do, or that ſhall leave their ſociety, muſt oblige all for ever to remain with them, for fear of giving them *offence*. If what I do is not evil in it ſelf, it cannot become ſuch, becauſe another Man is cauſeleſly angry with me for doing of it. Let but thoſe, who Separate from us, mortifie all pride and overweening opinion of themſelves, and their own way, let them lay aſide all Zeal of parties and little ſingularities, and learn to judge righteouſly and ſoberly of themſelves and others, and then the cauſe of all this *offence* will be ſoon removed.

2. they that pretend that this fear of *offending*, that is, diſpleaſing their *weak* Brethren hinders their complyance with the Church, ought ſeriouſly to examine themſelves, whether it is not really only the care of their credit, and reputation with their party, that keeps them from Conformity. They are loth to loſe that ſhare they have in the affections of ſo many, or to ſink in that eſtimation they have obtained of great Sanctity,

Sanctity, by joyning with the ſtricteſt and pureſt Chriſtians. For undoubtedly Mens reputation amongſt a party is a very great temptation to detain them in Error, and is a mighty prejudice to their underſtanding and receiving the truth, or the doing of their Duty, when it will expoſe them to reproach and opprobrious nicknames. Thus our *Saviour* ſaid of the *Jews*, John 5. 44. *How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and ſeek not the honour that cometh from God?*

When therefore Men tell us, it will be a *Scandalous* thing for them now to conform, they often mean nothing elſe by it, but that it will be unhandſom, and a diſgraceful thing for them to change their mind, and confeſs their miſtake, and retract what they have ſo long, and ſo Zealouſly defended. Or elſe let them look well, that it is not ſome paltry ſecular intereſt, that lies at the bottom, they dare not *Offend their weak Brethren*, that is; they are afraid they ſhall loſe their trade, they ſhall diſoblige many of their good cuſtomers, they get their livelyhood by ſuch a Congregation, and therefore they muſt continue of it. But this is truly to become the ſervants of Men, ſuch as theſe are the moſt rank Men-pleaſers, and therefore it is good advice of *Mr.* Baxter *in his Cure of Church diviſions*, p. 141. *Pleaſe men in all things lawful for their good and Edification; and become all things to all men in a lawful way: But depart not from the principles or practice of Chriſtian Union, Communion, Charity or Sobriety, to pleaſe a dividing hot brain'd Party, nor to eſcape their ſharpeſt cenſures.*

3. If to diſpleaſe our *weak Brother* were the ſinful *offending* him, condemned by St. *Paul*, it would prove an intolerable Yoke upon Mens Conſciences, would beget endleſs perplexities and difficulties, ſo that we ſhould not be able to do any thing, tho never ſo in-

different, with a quiet and well assured mind, since as the World now is, some one or other will in this sense be *Scandalized* at it. By doing we shall anger some, by forbearing we shall provoke others; and since those, who call themselves *weak*, are divided and shatter'd into several Sects and Factions, each condemning all the other, it is impossible for us to comply with any one of them, but we shall thereby displease all the rest. He therefore, that would with a good Conscience perform his duty, in whatever place he lives, or relation he stands in, must displease both good and bad Men, as things now are amongst us. *It is a very small thing, as St.* Paul *tells us, to be judged of Men*, when they pass their unwarrantable censures upon us, and our actions; and they, who govern themselves by the opinions and fancies of others, can never tell whither they shall be led by this principle. They are slaves to the Party they espouse, and must run with them into all the Folly and Extravagance they can be guilty of; or if at last they are forced to leave them, they shall in the end be more hated and despised by them, than if they had never humoured them at all.

4. I add only, that according to this Rule, that we must not do any thing which may displease or grieve our *weak Brethren*, we do in effect submit our Judgments and Consciences to the conduct of the most ignorant and injudicious Christians, and yield to them that Power and Authority over us, which we deny to the Magistrate and our Lawful Superiours; and it cannot but seem a very hard case, that they who are so tender of their Christian liberty, and think it so highly infringed and violated by the determinations of their Superiours about indifferent matters, should yet suffer themselves to be thus straitly tied up by the wills and passions of their *weak Brethren*. *If this*

were

were ſo, ſaith Mr. *Baxter*, p. 134. of the forenamed Book, *the moſt Childiſh and Womaniſh ſort of Chriſtians, who have the weakeſt judgments, and the ſtrongeſt wills and paſſions muſt rule all the World; for theſe are hardlieſt pleaſed, and no man muſt diſpleaſe them.* Whatever condeſcenſion therefore may be due to the *weak* and Ignorant, yet it was never intended that they ſhould govern the wiſer, and better inſtructed Chriſtians in all their actions; and who can Govern more Abſolutely, than they whoſe wills muſt never be croſſed, and whom none muſt diſpleaſe? From all this I conclude, that this cannot be the ſenſe of *Scandalizing or giving Offence*, *viz.* doing of ſomething, which another takes ill, or is angry with us for it.

2. I am now in the Second place to ſhew, what is the true meaning of *Offending* or *Scandalizing* in Scripture. The *Greek* word which we Tranſlate *Scandal* or *Offence* ſignifies either a Trap and Snare, or elſe more commonly ſomething laid in the way of another, which occaſions his ſtumbling or falling, by which he is bruiſed and hurt, and ſo conſequently, whatever it was that hindred Men from becoming Chriſts Diſciples, or diſcouraged them in their new Profeſſion, or tempted them to forſake that Faith they had lately embraced, is called a *Scandal* or *Offence*. It is ſometimes rendred an *occaſion to fall* as Rom. 14. 13. *occaſion of ſtumbling*, as 1 *Joh.* 2. 10. *a ſtumbling-block*, Revel. 2. 14. *or a thing that doth Offend*, as *St.* Matt. 13. 41. In all which places there is the ſame Original word.

Hence to *Offend* or *Scandalize* any one, as it is commonly uſed in the New Teſtament, is to do ſomething, which tends to eſtrange or fright Men from the Chriſtian Profeſſion, to beget in them hard and unworthy thoughts of it, or is apt, when they are converted,

verted, to turn them from it, and make them repent of their change. Of this I ſhall give ſome few inſtances out of the diſcourſes of our Saviour and his Apoſtles.

Thus our Bleſſed Lord, St. *Matth.* 17. 27. is ſaid to have paid tribute, leſt he ſhould *Offend* or Scandalize the Jews. This was more than he was bound to; for he tells us, *the Children are free.* But he did it, that he might not give any occaſion to his Enemies to repreſent him to the People, as a contemner of their Law, or an Enemy to *Cæſar*, (according as you underſtand that Tribute to be paid either to the Romans or the Temple) and ſo prejudice them againſt his Perſon and Doctrine. Thus our Saviours own Countrymen, who were acquainted with his Father, and Mother, and Kindred, who knew the meanneſs of his Birth and Education, *Mark* 6. 3. were *Offended* or Scandalized at him. They were aſtoniſhed at the great things he did, and the greater things he ſpoke, and would in all probability have believed on him, had they not known his mean Original and employment. *Is not this the Carpenter, the Son of* Mary, *&c.* After the ſame manner, when our Lord, St. *John* 6. 61. had diſcourſed of *eating the Fleſh of the Son of Man*, they that heard him, taking it in a groſs carnal ſenſe, were *Offended* or Scandalized at him. They began to doubt of his being a true Prophet, or the Meſſiah, who would teach his Diſciples to turn Cannibals.

Thus again our Saviour, before the night in which he was betrayed told his Diſciples, St. *Matt.* 26. 31. *all of ye ſhall be Offended* or Scandalized, *becauſe of me this Night*; that is, ſhall fly away and ſhamefully forſake me, when you behold my hard uſage, and diſmal ſufferings. So *Chriſt Crucified*, 1 Cor. 1. 23.

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to the Jews was a Scandal or ſtumbling-block; that is, they had ſet their minds and hearts on a temporal earthly King, and expected to be freed from the Roman Yoke, and to be reſtored to their former Dominions and greatneſs, as the effect of the coming of their Meſſiah, and therefore could not be perſuaded to own him for their Prince, and Saviour, and the Son of God, who was put to ſuch a Curſed and Ignominious death. In the ſame ſenſe they who *heard the Word of God*, Mark 4. 17. *and received it with gladneſs, but having no root in themſelves, when Affliction or Perſecution aroſe for the Words ſake, were preſently offended* or Scandalized; that is, were ready to leave and renounce that Profeſſion, that was likely to coſt them ſo dear.

After the publiſhing of the Goſpel by the Apoſtles, that which moſt ſtumbled the Jewiſh Converts, was the danger *Moſes*'s Law and their Temple Worſhip, and the ſingular preeminences of the Seed of *Abraham*, ſeemed to be in of being undermined by Chriſtianity. They were ſtrangely wedded to their Legal obſervances, fond of Circumciſion and thoſe peculiarities, which diſtinguiſhed their Nation from the reſt of mankind, they were jealous of any Doctrine, that encroached upon their Priviledges, or tended to bring them down to the ſame level with the Uncircumciſed World. This mightily *Offended* them, and hardned them againſt Chriſtianity; whereas on the other ſide, the Gentile Converts with as much reaſon, were afraid of putting their Necks under ſo heavy a Yoke, or being brought into ſubjection to the Jewiſh Law, and there was no ſuch effectual way to ſcare them from Chriſtianity, as when it came attended with the burden of the Moſaical Ceremonies; which were an *Offence* to them; that is, did diſcourage them from believing in Chriſt, or continuing in his Faith. Now to prevent the miſchiefs, that might ariſe from

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these different apprehensions amongst the Christian Proselites, was the occasion of the meeting of that first Council at *Jerusalem*, mentioned *Acts* 15. and of those directions which St. *Paul* gives *Rom.* 14. concerning our behaviour towards *weak Brethren*.

Another case there was concerning eating of things offered to Idols, of which St. *Paul* discourseth in his first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, *chap.* 8. *and* 10. the sum of which seems to be this, that the stronger and wiser Christians ought to abstain from eating what had been offered to Idols, tho as ordinary meat, in the presence of any one, who *with Conscience of the Idol, did eat it as a thing offered to an Idol.* For such there were in the Church of *Corinth* so weak, as not yet to have quite left off their Idolatrous Worship, and a Christians eating what had been Offered in Sacrifice before such an one might serve to harden, and confirm him in his Error, *whose Conscience being weak is defiled.* Of whose Soul St. *Paul* professed himself to have so great regard, that he would *eat no such meat as long as the World lasted*, rather than lay such a stumbling-block before, or wound their *weak* Consciences. In all these places and many more that might be named (for the fuller explication of which I refer you to interpreters, and those that have written largely on this subject) no less than Apostacy from the Christian Faith was the sin, into which these *weak* Christians were so apt to fall, and by an undue use of our Liberty to give occasion to anothers forsaking the Christian Religion, whereby our Saviour loseth a Disciple, and the Soul of our Brother perisheth, is the proper sin of *Offending*, or *giving Scandal*.

I shall mention but one place more, which is *Revel.* 2. 14. where *Balaam* is said to have taught *Balac*, *to cast a stumbling-block* or Scandal *before the Children*

of

of *Iſrael*, which relates of his inticing them by the Daughters of *Moab* to Fornication and Idolatry, and by that means provoking God againſt them. So that in the moſt general ſenſe to *Scandalize* or *Offend* any one, is, to give occaſion to his ſin, and conſequently his ruin and undoing; and this I ſuppoſe will be granted by all, that do not receive their opinions from the meer ſound of words. Hence I ſhall conclude theſe few things.

1. The better Men are, the harder it is to *Scandalize* them: Thoſe are not ſuch Godly perſons, as they would be thought, who are ſo ready at all turns to be *Offended*; for how can they be reckon'd to excel others in knowledg or goodneſs, who are ſo eaſily upon every occaſion drawn or tempted to ſin? Thus Mr. *Baxter* himſelf tells the Separatiſts in his *Cure of Church Diviſions*. *Uſually*, ſaith he, *men talk moſt againſt Scandalizing thoſe, whom they account to be the beſt, and the beſt are leaſt in danger of ſinning; and ſo they accuſe them to be the worſt, or elſe they know not what they ſay; for ſuppoſe a Separatiſt ſhould ſay, if you hold Communion with any Pariſh Miniſter or Church in* England, *it will be a Scandal to many good people: I would ask ſuch an one, Why call you thoſe good people that are eaſily drawn to ſin againſt God? Nay, that will ſin becauſe I do my duty: Therefore if you know what you ſay, you make the Separatiſts almoſt the worſt of men, that will ſin againſt God, becauſe another will not ſin.*

The great thing our *Nonconformiſts* pretend unto above other men, is tenderneſs of Conſcience, by which they muſt mean, if they mean any Vertue by it, a great fear of doing any thing that is evil; and this, where it is in truth, is the beſt ſecurity that can be deviſed againſt being *Scandalized* or *Offended*, by what other Men do; that is, againſt being drawn into ſin by it. So that they do really diſparage and ſevere-

ly reflect upon the *Dissenters*, who are thus afraid of giving them *Offence*, as I have explained it.

2. No man can with sense say of himself, that he shall be *Scandalized* at what another man does; for it is as much as to say, that by such a person and action, he shall be led into sin ignorantly, and his saying this confutes his ignorance: If he knows it to be a sin, he is not betrayed into it, nor doth he fall into it through ignorance and mistake (which is the case of those that are *Scandalized*) but wilfully commits it. This a great Bishop compares with the peevishness of a little Child, who when he is commanded to pronounce the word he hath no mind to, tells you he cannot pronounce that word, at the same time naming the word he pretends he cannot speak. Such Nonsense it is for a man to forbid me doing any thing upon pretence it will be a *Scandal* to him, or make him through mistake fall into some sin, when by this it is plain, that he knows of it beforehand, and so may, and ought to avoid the stumbling-block that is laid before him, and the danger that he is exposed unto. *Surely* saith *Solomon*, Prov. 1. 17. *in vain is the Net spread in the sight of any Bird.*

If to *Offend* or *Scandalize*, any one is to tempt and draw him into some sin, whereby his Conscience is wounded, there then can be no fear of giving Offence by our Conformity to the orders and usages of our Church, because there is nothing appointed by or used in it, but what may be complyed withal without sin: For this, as I before observed, is supposed in the Question I at first propounded to discourse of; that he, who absented from his Parish Church for fear of *Offending his weak Brethren*, was convinced in his own mind of the lawfulness of all that is enjoyn'd; and therefore by his own Conformity, he can only engage others to do as he hath done, which as long as he is perswaded to be

lawful,

lawful, I do not see how he can be afraid of *Scandalizing* others by it, or making them to sin by his Example, unless he will imagine his Brethren, not so *weak*, but so wicked, as to Worship the *Host*, because he Kneels at receiving of the Sacrament, and to adore the Cross because he bows at the Name of Jesus, or that they will renounce all Religion because he hath forsaken their ways of Separation: This cannot but prove a vain excuse for me to forbear doing that, in which there is really no evil, lest by the Authority of my example I make others sin in doing the same innocent action; which in this case is so far from being to be feared, that if by my example I prevail with others to return into the Communion of our Church, they are not thereby at all *Scandalized*, but I have done them a most signal kindness and benefit.

If it be said, that tho what I do is in it self lawful, yet it may minister occasion or provocation to others to do something else that is unlawful, and so I become truly guilty of giving *Offence*; I Answer, that we are accountable only for the natural tendencies, or probable effects of our actions, which may be easily foreseen and prevented. Remote probabilities and contingencies and bare possibilities come not into reckoning, nor are they at all to be weighed. If in every action I am bound to consider what advantage a wicked sensual Man, or a weak silly man might take, and what Arguments he might possibly thence draw to encourage himself in sin and folly, or excuse himself from the care of his Soul and Religion, this would open the door to infinite Scrupulosity and trouble, and I should hardly be able to do or speak any thing without the incurring the guilt of giving *Scandal*. Now this being supposed, I dare boldly challenge any Man to name any one sin either against God, our Neigh-

bour, or our ſelves, that our Conformity doth give any real probable occaſion unto; and it is very uncharitable to conceit, that our Nonconforming Brethren will out of meer perverſeneſs, or ſpite and revenge run into ſin, on purpoſe to make our leaving them criminal and vicious; which if any ſhould be ſo wicked as to do, yet they would loſe the deſign of their malice, and prove the only guilty perſons themſelves.

The only thing I imagine can be further ſaid in this caſe is, that tho I am well ſatisfied my ſelf, yet by my Conformity I may tempt and provoke others that are not ſatisfied concerning the lawfulneſs of it, nay thoſe who judge it abſolutely ſinful, yet rather than ſtand out, or being moved by the opinion they have of my goodneſs and Wiſdom, to follow my example with a doubting or gainſaying Conſcience. Suppoſe a Maſter of Family that uſed to frequent the private Meetings, and his Wife and Children and Servants uſed to follow him thither; but afterwards, by reading of ſuch good Books as have been lately written, is himſelf ſatisfied concerning the lawfulneſs of going to Church, and at laſt thinks it his duty ſo to do, only he is afraid that the reſt of his Family to pleaſe and humour him, will be apt alſo to forſake the private Meetings, and go along with him to Church, tho it be altogether againſt their judgment and Conſcience: Or ſuppoſe him a man of eminency amongſt his Neighbours, on whoſe favour many do depend, of great intereſt and reputation, by whoſe example many are sway'd and led. Tho himſelf doth conform upon good reaſons and principles, yet his example may invite many others to it, tho they have received no ſatisfaction concerning the lawfulneſs of it.

Now

Now here I desire these three things may be considered.

1. It is certain that it is as unlawful to go to the Separate Meetings against ones Conscience, as it is to go to the publick Church against ones Conscience. Why then ought not this man to be as afraid, when he leaves his Parish-Church and frequents the private Congregation, lest he should draw some to follow him thither with a doubting Conscience; as well as he fears, if he leaves the Meetings and resorts to his Parish-Church, some not satisfied concerning the lawfulness of it, should come after him thither? The influence of his Example, interest, reputation, is the same in both instances; the danger of giving this *Scandal* is equal; that therefore which ought to determine his practice must be his own Judgment and persuasion.

2. Such an one, who hath been a Separatist, but is now himself satisfied of the lawfulness of Conformity; ought to take great care and pains in endeavouring to satisfie others also, especially those, whom he hath any cause to think to have been led into the ways of Separation by his example: He must not be ashamed to own his former mistake, to set before them the reasons on which his change is grounded, and must do this publickly and frequently, persuading others to use the same helps and means, which were so effectual for his own conviction. And thus he doth all that lieth in his power to prevent this ill effect, and shall not be further answerable for the consequences of what he doth.

3. It is truly observed by some, that considering the known temper of the *Nonconformists*, it is not very likely any such mischief should ensue, *viz.* that by the example of one or more leaving their Separate Assemblies, others should be moved to follow them against

their

their own Judgment and Conſcience. It is abundantly notorious how they have uſed to treat thoſe that have deſerted them; with what irreconcileable enmity they have proſecuted them, looking upon them as their worſt Enemies, paſſing more grievous cenſures upon them than upon thoſe who have all their lives long continued in our Communion.

4. I proceed in the laſt place to obſerve from what I have diſcourſed concerning *giving Offence*, that if to *Offend* any one, be to lead him into ſin, then we may *Scandalize* and *give Offence* to others, as ſoon by pleaſing them and complying with them, as by diſpleaſing them and going contrary to their mind and humour.

St. *Paul*, who Circumciſed *Timothy*, *Acts* 16. 3. in favour of the *weak Jews* that he might inſinuate and ingratiate himſelf into them, refuſed to Circumciſe *Titus*, *Galat.* 2. 3. tho he made the *Jews* angry by it, yet he would *not give place by ſubjection*, or ſubmiſſion and condeſcenſion to them, *no not for an hour*: He conſidered the different ſtates and conditions of the perſons he had to deal withal. He complyed to Circumciſe *Timothy*, leſt all the *Jews* with him ſhould have forſaken the Chriſtian Faith, and for the ſame reaſon he denied to Circumciſe *Titus*, leſt thoſe of *Jeruſalem* ſhould think he was of opinion, that the Jewiſh Law held ſtill in force, and ſo the Croſs of Chriſt ſhould become of no effect to them. He pleaſed indeed the former for fear of driving them from Chriſtianity, and for the ſame reaſon he diſpleaſed the latter, leſt he ſhould give them occaſion to think the obſervation of *Moſes*'s Law always neceſſary. He had truly *Scandalized* them, if he had done as they would have had him: He had *Offended* them in the true Scripture ſenſe, if he had pleaſed and humoured them; and this is the moſt ordinary way of *Scandalizing* Chriſtians amongſt

mongſt us, by not plainly telling Men of their faults and miſtakes, by not ſpeaking freely and roundly to them, nor acting couragiouſly, whereby they become hardned and confirmed in their folly and ignorance.

To this purpoſe I cannot but repeat the words of Mr. *Baxter* in the *Book* I have ſo often cited; *Many a time*, ſaith he, *I have the rather gone to the Common-Prayers of the publick Aſſemblies for fear of being a Scandal to thoſe ſame men that called the going to them a Scandal: that is, for fear of hardning them in a ſinful Separation and Error; becauſe I knew that was not Scandal which they called Scandal; that is, diſpleaſing them, and croſſing their opinions; but hardning them in an Error or other ſin, is true Scandalizing. Underſtand this, or you will diſpleaſe God under pretence of avoiding Scandal*, p. 135.

Thus by complying with our Diſſenting Brethren we really do them that miſchief which we would avoid, and fall into the ſin of giving *Scandal*, whileſt we are running from it; We countenance and encourage their ſinful Separation and Diviſion; we confirm them in their dangerous Errors and Miſtakes; we by our practice condemn thoſe things, which yet in our Conſciences we allow and approve of, and by our Authority and influence harden others in their unreaſonable prejudices and oppoſition againſt the lawful Commands of their Superiours. They think us of the ſame mind with themſelves, whilſt we do the ſame things, and that we judge as ill of the Church of *England*, as long as we refuſe to Communicate with it, as themſelves do; and thus we give occaſion to their ſin, and thoſe infinite miſchiefs which have happened both to Church and State, upon the account of our Religious diſputes and diviſions; which ſurely ought to be well thought of and conſidered by a ſort of Men amongſt

us,

us, who shall go to Church in the Morning, and to a Conventicle in the Afternoon; who halt between both, and would fain displease neither side, but indeed give real *Offence* to both. From all this I think it is very plain, that he, who is satisfied in his own mind of the lawfulness of Conformity, but is afraid of giving *Offence* by it, if he be true to this principle, ought to hasten the faster to his Parish-Church, that he might not *Offend* those very Dissenters of whom he would seem to be so tender; and thus I have done with the Second thing I propounded to shew, what is meant by *Offending* or *Scandalizing*,

3. It remaineth in the Third and Last place to enquire; how far, and in what instances we are bound to consider the ignorance or *weakness* of our Brother? In Answer to this, that I may proceed with all the clearness I can, I shall now suppose notwithstanding all I have already said, that our *Dissenting Brethren* are truly *weak* persons, and that there may be some danger of their being through their own fault *Offended* by our Conformity; yet taking this for granted, I shall plainly shew that he, who is in his own mind convinced of the lawfulness of coming to his Parish-Church, and using the Forms of Prayer and Ceremonies by Law appointed, ought not to forbear doing the same for fear of giving such *Offence* to his *weak Brethren*. There are many other things to be considered in this Case, besides this matter of private *Scandal*; and if there be greater evil in, and greater mischief to others, and a more publick *Scandal* doth follow our forbearing Communion with the Church and withdrawing into private Assemblies, than can happen by our leaving them and returning to the Church, and complying with its orders, we ought then to conform notwithstanding the *Offence* that is imagined may be

be taken at it. For these two things, as I suppose, are agreed on all hands; one is, that nothing which is sinful may be done to avoid *Scandalizing* others; the other is, that to avoid a less *Scandal* being taken by a few, we must not give a greater *Scandal* and of vastly more pernicious consequence to a much bigger number of persons; and by these two Rules I shall now judge of the Case at first propounded.

1. Nothing that is sinful may be done to avoid others being *Scandalized*, which is directly the *Apostles Doctrine*, Rom. 3. 8. *That we must not do evil, that good may come*; nor is any necessary duty to be omitted out of prudence or charity to others, lest they through Error or Ignorance be hurt by it. We must not to prevent the greatest sin in another, commit the least sin our selves, nor disobey Gods Law, and so run the hazard of our own damnation, tho it be to save the Soul of our Brother. Thus *Calvin* tells us, *Instit. lib.* 3. c. 19. *Quæ necessaria sunt facta, nullius offendiculi timore omittenda sunt. Whatever is necessary to be done by vertue of Gods Command is not to be omitted for fear of Offence*; and again in the same place, *Hic Charitatis rationem habere decet, sed usque ad aras. Our charity to our Brother ought to be limited by this, that we do not for his sake displease God.*

The very best things and actions may be perverted by Men of ill-disposed or weak minds, false consequences and unjust inferences may be strained from them; as we know the grace of God in the Gospel was abused into an argument for licentiousness, and *Christ* himself is said *to be set for the fall of many*, St. *Luke* 2. 24. but still this doth not Cancel our obligations to universal obedience to Gods Law, nor can it alter the nature of good and evil, duty and sin; which are no such uncertain contingent things, as to depend

upon the constructions others shall make of our actions, or the conclusions they shall draw from them. God Almighty in the making of his Laws hath a perfect comprehension of all the accidental events, that may happen either through the weakness or wickedness of Men; and we must not think our selves to be wiser than God, taking upon our selves to dispense with his Commands without any allowance from him, as if himself had not foreseen those inconveniences which may arise from our doing our duty: it can therefore never be, that obedience to God should give any real *Scandal*; and whatever *Offence* may be taken at my doing of my duty, it is a contradiction to imagine it imputable to me, as a sin of mine, for it is to suppose me to disobey God, in obeying him; but they alone are chargeable who are *Offended* by it.

Now by the express Command of God, we are obliged to obey the lawful injunctions of our Superiours, whether Civil or Ecclesiastical; and if any are so hardy as to deny this, they must seek for another *Bible* out of which to judge of Gods will; for there is hardly any one duty of Religion more plainly Commanded, more frequently and earnestly pressed in the New Testament, than quiet and peaceable subjection to Authority, both in Church and State, in all things lawful, and that not only to avoid punishment, but for Conscience sake; and to refuse obedience in such things, is a sin against the fifth Commandment. That the Conformity required by our Church, contains not any thing in it unlawful, must be granted, as I have already observed, by all those who make use of this Plea of *Scandal*, from all which the necessary Conclusion is,

Since

Since we may not redeem a *Scandal* by disobedience to God, since God hath plainly required our submission to those whom he hath set over us in all things lawful; since it is acknowledged by them I now discourse with, that Conformity to the Church is enjoyned by a competent Authority, and is lawful; I say the necessary conclusion is, that no Man can with a good Conscience refuse to conform only for fear of *Scandal*.

Our *Dissenting Brethren*, when they are urged with this Argument neither do nor can deny any of the Premises, they must confess that no sin may be committed upon any account whatsoever, and that a Man is not bound to provide for his Brothers safety by wounding his own Soul; they cannot deny but that God hath Commanded us to be subject to Lawful Authority in all things lawful, but then to evade the force of this reasoning, they have endeavoured to load the conclusion with some seeming difficulties and absurdities, which they pretend follow from this principle, that we are bound to obey, notwithstanding the *Scandal* that may ensue upon it. The chief of these I shall mention, and briefly return an Answer to them.

1. It is pleaded that *those precepts, which contain only rituals, are to give place to those, which do concern the welfare of Mens Bodies, and much more to those, which do respect the welfare of our Brothers Soul; so that, when both together cannot be observed, we must neglect or violate the former, to observe the latter*: That this is true even of some Commands given by God himself; to which purpose our *Saviour* doth produce that saying of the *Prophet* Hosea, *I will have Mercy and not Sacrifice*. Now if *Sacrifices* prescribed by God himself, which were so considerable a part of the Divine Worship under *Moses*'s Law, yet were to

give place to acts of mercy, how much more are the positive injunctions of Men, that concern only the externals and circumstances of Religion, to yield to the Royal and indispensable Law of Charity, of which this duty of not giving Offence to others, is such an Eminent part. Thus saith Mr. Jeanes in his Second Part of *Scholastical Divinity*. *What Laws of any Earthly Wight whatsoever concerning Ceremonies can be more obligatory, than the Commands of God touching the externals of his Worship and Service; and yet it is his will and pleasure, that those externals of his Worship should be laid aside for the performance of outward works of mercy. If therefore the sacred Ordinances of God are to give way unto works of mercy unto the bodies of Men, surely they much more in the trash of human inventions to yield unto a work of mercy to the Souls of Men.*

In answer to this, it is readily acknowledged that when there doth happen any such interfering between two Commands of God, the one Positive, the other Moral, the Positive ought always to give place to the Moral; and by the same reason the positive Commands of our Superiours ought certainly to give way to the Moral Commands of God, which are of eternal and immutable obligation. They cease to bind us either in case of absolute necessity, or when they plainly hinder our performance of any Moral duty to God or our Neighbour, and the Church is presumed to dispense with its orders, as God Almighty doth allow the neglect of his own positive Institutions in such circumstances. But then this is only, where the necessity is urgent and extream, the sin we must otherwise commit, evident and certain, and at last our Obedience is dispensed with but only for that one time.

Thus in a case of necessity, Our *Saviour St.* Matth. 12.

12. 5. acquits *David* and his followers of all blame, who being ready to perish for hunger, *did eat of the Shewbread, which otherwise, was not lawful for them to eat*; but had they taken a particular fancy to that Bread, and refused to have eaten of any other, because that best agreed with their Stomacks, and was most pleasing to their Palate; can we think our *Saviour* would have so easily excused them? Or which is nearer to our Case; because God did prefer acts of *Mercy* before *Sacrifices* where both could not be done, yet this would not have justified any mans wholly leaving off *Sacrificing*, or refusing to do it at *Jerusalem*, inventing another way of Worship as more expedient than Sacrificing, or choosing another place to Sacrifice in, which might be more convenient for all the *Jews* than that City was. We may leave our Prayers, forsake the Church to save the life of our Neighbour, or to quench the firing of his House, but still this would be but a pityful pretence for our wholly absenting our selves from Church, and constant neglect of our Prayers, because in the mean time our Neighbours life may be invaded, or his house fired by ill Men, of which there is great store in the World, and so he may stand in need of our help, which is a more acceptable Service to God than any acts of Devotion. So that however this Argument may serve to excuse the omission of some things Commanded by lawful Authority, by those who otherwise are perfectly conformable, in extraordinary cases which very rarely happen, and for which no provision could be made by Law; yet to be sure this will not at all help those, who bid open defiance to the Laws, stand out in manifest opposition against them, live in plain disobedience and contradiction to them as if they were altogether free from them, nay set up a distinct way and form of Worship

of

of their own, and all this because they are loth to *Offend* those, who are not satisfied of the wisdom and goodness of what is appointed.

Thus our Dissenting Brethren can gain but little by this Plea if granted to them; for upon this account of exercising mercy and charity towards their Neighbours, they can be excused from Obedience to their Superiours in such cases only, in which they may be excused also from the observation of the Sabbath, from Prayer publick or private, from Worshipping of God either in the Church or in a Conventicle, nay from Obedience to God himself; had he pleased in the Scriptures positively to have required whatever is at present enjoyned by our Church; and let them well consider, whether if God had plainly in his Word prescribed all that our Church doth Command, they would have thought it safe to have refused compliance with such divine impositions, because they were unreasonably *offensive* to some Godly people: If our *Dissenters* will but acknowledge themselves bound to submit to the determinations of their Superiours about the things in controversie between us, so far, as the *Jews* were bound to obey the ordinances of God concerning his external Worship delivered by *Moses*; and that they are freed from such obligation to obey the Laws of their Governours only in such cases, as the *Jews* were excused from offering their accustomed Sacrifices, or as they think themselves at liberty to break the Sabbath, to omit Gods Publick Worship, I suppose this dispute would soon be at an end, for they dare not own, that the *Scandal* others may take at such things, which yet are to give place to moral duties, is sufficient to void their obligation to the doing of them.

Mr. Evans (whose objections I shall the rather consider because of his eminency amongst the *Presbyterians*,

rians, tho I find my self somewhat prevented by a late Writer, who hath taken particular notice of them, thus putteth the Question, *Suppose*, saith he, *the greatest Monarch upon the face of the Earth should command the meanest and lowest of his Slaves, upon some important affair to ride Post through such a City, without any of the least stay or diversion, and then it should happen that a company of little Children should be playing in the Streets, can this Slave think that he is obliged to ride over them?* No surely, he ought to use all means, and take all care possible to execute his Commission without doing any hurt, or damage to any person whatever; but if he would have stated the case right, it should have been done thus; suppose this Slave should utterly refuse to do as he was Commanded, and for his justification should plead, that he must be forced to ride through many Towns and Cities, where are many little Children, who are often playing at the Doors, or in the Streets; he knows not but that some of them may be in his way, or chance to run between his Horses legs, and therefore to avoid the doing of this mischief, which might possibly happen, he resolves not to stir one foot from his own home. Is this pretence sufficient to excuse his disobedience? No more can our Nonconformity to the rules given us by our Superiours be innocent, because some may be *Scandalized* at our Obedience.

2. It is further said that *Scandal is in the nature of it Spiritual murder, and if where Authority hath determined our choice, we must hold to their determination, any Scandal to the contrary notwithstanding, it seemeth then in case the Magistrate command it, we may lawfully murther the Soul of our Brother, wound his weak Conscience, and destroy with our meats, our Ceremonies, the work of God, and him for whom Christ died. It is*

good

good, saith St. Paul, Rom. 14. 21. *neither to eat Flesh, nor to drink Wine, nor any thing whereby thy Brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. But our Prelatists, saith Mr.* Jeans, *determine quite otherwise. If Authority enjoyn it, it is good, say they, to eat Bread, drink Wine, wear a Surplice, use the sign of the Cross in Baptism, tho thereby never so many Brethren stumble, or are offended, or made weak.*

But all this is meer bugbear, fitted only to fright Children and such weak persons, as we are now treating of; for it can never be shewen, how wearing a Surplice, or Kneeling at receiving of the Sacrament, or Crossing the Infants forehead, hath any tendency towards the scaring Men from Christianity, or making them to deny Christ, and forsake and grow weary of his Religion, which I have sufficiently proved to be the only proper *Scandalizing* of our Brother, which St. *Paul* so highly aggravateth, and chargeth with the guilt of destroying and murthering his Soul; none of these things do directly and immediately lead or tempt any man to any sin: Whatever *Scandal* may follow is wholly accidental, and the fault and mistake of those only, who are *Offended*, and to provide always against such *Scandals* is an impossible undertaking; for they may follow the most innocent actions, nay the most necessary duties, and this Argument concludes as strongly against obedience to any other Command of God, if by it my *Brother may stumble, or be offended, or be made weak*, as it doth against submission to our Superiours in things lawful.

They that make these Objections do not sufficiently consider, that by Gods Law we are bound to obey the Lawful Commands of our Superiours; and it is not only the Law or Ordinance of Man, of which they seem to make so little account, but it is the Law of God

God also, that is violated by our disobedience to our Governours in things Lawful: The Comparison therefore ought not to be only, as they make it, between an human Authority determining some indifferent things, and the divine Law of charity to the Soul of our Brother, but between the divine Command of obedience to our Superiours, and the avoiding of *Scandal*: Here we affirm, that we cannot be bound to transgress a plain Law of God, or which is all one in this Question, a lawful command of our Superiours for fear of some evil that may by chance happen to some others through their own fault; and we prove it by this reason, which our Dissenting Brethren must own for true and good, because *every one is bound to have a greater care of his own than others Salvation, and consequently rather to avoid sin in himself, than to prevent it in his Brethren.*

If it be here asked, as it is by some, *whether any human Authority can make that action cease to be Scandalous, which if done without any such Command had been criminal upon the account of the Scandal that followed it*, I Answer, that no Authority, whether divine or human, can secure that others shall not be *Offended* by what I do out of obedience to their Commands, but then it doth free me from all guilt and blame, by making that to become my duty to do, which if I had done needlesly without any great reason, and my Brother had been hurt and his Conscience wounded by it, might have been justly charged with uncharitableness, greater or less according as the *Scandal* was more or less probable to follow.

This must be granted, that the Laws of God or Man, otherwise obligatory, do not lose their binding force because of some *Scandal*, that may possibly happen from our Complyance with them, or else all Authority is utterly void and insignificant, and every Man

is at liberty to do all things as himself pleaseth: for, to borrow the words of the excellent Bishop *Sanderson*, *To allow Men under pretence that some offence may be taken thereat, to disobey Laws and Constitutions made by those that are in Authority over us, is the next way to cut the sinews of all Authority, and to bring both Magistrates and Laws into contempt; for what Law ever was made, or can be made so just and reasonable, but some Man or other either did or might take offence thereat.* Whether such a Constitution or Command of our Superiours be Scandalous or no, every one must judge for himself; and so according to his own private opinion of the goodness or hurtfulness of what is required, he is free to obey it or not, which is directly to dissolve all Government, and to bring in certain disorder and everlasting confusion, every one doing what is good in his own Eyes.

3. It is said, that *Avoiding of Scandal is a main duty of charity; May Superiours therefore at their pleasure appoint, how far I shall shew my charity towards my Brothers Soul? then surely an inferiour Earthly Court may cross the determinations of the High Court of Heaven:* This Mr. *Jeans* urgeth also out of *Amesius*; *but it is easily replyed,*

That here is no Crossing the determinations of God, since it is his express will, that in all lawful things we should obey our Governours, and he who hath made this our duty, will not lay to our charge the mischiefs, that may sometimes without our fault through the folly and peevishness of Men follow from it, and certainly it is as equal and reasonable, that our Superiours should appoint how far I shall exercise my charity towards my Brethren, as it is, that the mistake and prejudice of any private Christians should set bounds to their Power and Authority, Cancel the publick Laws,

or

or that every ignorant and froward Brother ſhould determin, how far we ſhall be obedient to thoſe, whom God hath ſet over us either in Church or State.

But to give a more full Anſwer to this we muſt know, that, tho charity be the great duty, eſpecially of the Chriſtian Religion, yet duties of juſtice (as they are commonly called) are of ſtricter obligation than duties of charity, and we are bound to pay our debts, before we give an alms. Now obedience to Superiours is a debt we owe to them, which they have right to exact of us, ſo that they may accuſe us of injury, if we perform it not. But a great care to hinder ſin in others, or not to Scandalize them is a duty of charity, which indeed we are obliged unto as far as we can, but not till after we have given to every one what is his due and right. *It is therefore no more Lawful for me*, ſaith the forenamed moſt Judicious Biſhop *Sanderſon*, *to diſobey the lawful Command of a Superiour, to prevent thereby the offence of one or a few Brethren, then it is lawful for me to do one man wrong to do another man a courteſie withal; or than it is lawful for me to rob the Exchequer to relieve an Hoſpital.* According to that known ſaying of St. *Auſtin*, *Quis eſt qui dicat, ut habeamus quod demus pauperibus, faciamus furta divitibus? Who is it, that ſaith it is lawful to ſteal from the rich, what we may beſtow on the poor?* or to refuſe to pay Taxes, on pretence that you know thoſe who have more need of your money?

To this Mr. *Jeans* replies, *Suppoſe*, ſaith he, *the care of not giving offence be in reſpect of our Brother but a debt of charity, yet in regard of God it is a legal debt, ſince he may and doth challenge it as due, and we do him wrong if we diſobey him:* Here I grant indeed, that both are required by God at our hands, that we ſhould be obedient to our Superiours, and that we

ſhould be always ready to ſhew charity to our Brethren; but then I ſay, this is not the charity which God requires, when I give to thoſe in want, what is none of mine own. This is not an inſtance or expreſſion of that love and kindneſs, which by the Law of God we owe to our Brother, to do him good by wronging our Superiours. God hath obliged Servants to be merciful to the poor to their power, as well as to be true and faithful to their Maſters; but that is no part of the mercy which God requires from them; to give away their Maſters goods without his leave, tho it were to thoſe who ſtand in great need of relief. God hath Commanded all Chriſtians to have a great care of being any occaſion of their Brothers ſin or fall; but then this muſt neceſſarily be underſtood only of things ſubject to our own ordering and management. In all caſes, wherein we are at our own diſpoſal, we are bound charitably to regard our Brother. But in inſtances, where our practice is determined by Authority, our Superiours only are to conſider the danger of Scandal; we muſt conſider the duty we owe to them, this being a matter wherein we cannot ſhew our charity without violating the right of our Superiours; It remains then, in the words of another great *Biſhop*, *in what caſe ſoever we are bound to obey God or Man, in that caſe and in that conjunction of circumſtances we have nothing permitted to our choice,* (and conſequently there is no place for any act of charity) *and have no Authority to remit of the right of God or our Superiour; and to comply with our Neighbour in ſuch Queſtions, beſides that it cannot ſerve any purpoſes of piety, if it declines from duty in any inſtance, it is like giving Alms out of the portion of Orphans, or building Hoſpitals with the Money and ſpoils of Sacrilege.*

4. It

4. It is further said by Mr. *Jeans* out of *Amesius*; *If determination by Superiours is sufficient to take away the sin of Scandal, then they do very ill, then they do not, so far as is possible, determine all things indifferent; that so no danger may be left of giving Offence by the use of them. Then the Church of* Rome *is to be praised in that she hath determined so many indifferent things. Then St.* Paul *might have spared all his directions about forbearance out of respect to weak Brethren, and fully determined the matters in debate, and so put an end to all fear of Scandal.*

This truly seemeth a very odd way of arguing, and all that I shall say to it is, that it supposeth nothing else worthy to be considered in the making of Laws, or in the determinations of Superiours about indifferent things, but only this one matter of Scandal; and the project it self, should it take, would prove very vain and unsuccessful. For tho we truly say, that we are bound to comply with the Orders and Ceremonies of the Church of *England*, they being but few and innocent, and so giving no real ground of *Offence*; yet we do not say the same upon supposition our Church had determined all circumstances in Gods Worship she possibly could, which would perhaps have been a yoke greater, than that of the Ceremonial Law to the *Jews*; nor if she had prescribed as many Ceremonies as the Church of *Rome* hath done, which manifestly tend to the disgrace and Scandal of our Christian Religion; and as for the course St. *Paul* took, it is plain that some things upon good reasons were determined by the Apostles, as that the Gentile Converts should *abstain from blood, and things strangled, and offered to Idols*, which decree, I presume, they might not Transgress out of charity to any of their Brethren, who might take *Offence* at such abstinence, and other things for great reason were for a time

time left at liberty, which reason was taken from the present circumstances of those the Apostles had to deal with: tho afterwards, as I observed before, when that reason ceased, determinations were made about those things which St. *Paul* had left at liberty, and if St. *Paul* had determined the dispute about *meats* and *days* one way, they, who had followed so great an Authority, whatever had happened, had surely been free from the sin of *Scandal*; but still the *Scandal* had not been prevented, but all the contrary part had been in danger to have been utterly estranged from Christianity; and that was reason sufficient why St. *Paul* did not make any determinations in that case. For Governours are not only to take care to free those that obey them from the sin of *Scandal*, but also to provide, that as little occasion, as is possible, may be given to any to be *Scandalized*.

There are other Objections offered by Mr. *Jeans*, out of *Amesius* and *Rutherford*, against this Doctrine of our obligation to obedience to Superiours in things lawful, notwithstanding the Scandal that may follow; but they either may be Answered from what I have already said, or else they chiefly concern the case of Governours, and are brought to prove that they act uncharitably, and give great *Offence* contrary to St. *Pauls* rules, who take upon them determinately to impose unnecessary rites by which they know many good Men will be *Scandalized*, but this is not my present business to discourse of, tho I cannot forbear saying these two things, which I think very easie to make out.

1. That our Church of *England* hath taken all reasonable care not to give any just offence to any sort of persons, and the offences that have been since taken at some things in our Constitution could not possibly have been

been foreſeen by thoſe who made our firſt Reformation from Popery, and ſo they could not be any reaſon againſt the firſt eſtabliſhment: Nor,

2. Are they now a ſufficient reaſon for the alteration of it; unleſs we can imagine it reaſonable to alter publick Laws made with great wiſdom and deliberation as often, as they are diſliked by, or prove *Offenſive* to private perſons. If this be admitted, there then can never be any ſetled Government and order in the Church; becauſe there never can be any eſtabliſhment, that will not be lyable to give ſuch *Offence*. They who now take *Offence* at what the Church of *England* enjoyns, on the ſame or a like account will take *Offence* at whatever can be enjoyned, and the ſame pretences of *Scandal* will be good againſt any eſtabliſhment they themſelves ſhall make; for tho they will not uſe theſe reaſons againſt their own eſtabliſhment, yet in a ſhort time others will take up their weapons to fight againſt them, and what ſerved to deſtroy the preſent Church will be as effectual to overthrow that, which ſhall be ſet up in its room: ſo that whatever alteration is made, if this be allowed for a ſufficient ground of it, *viz.* to avoid the *Offence* that ſome men take at the preſent conſtitution, yet ſtill we ſhall be but where we were, and new *Offences* will ariſe, and ſo there muſt be continual changing and altering, to gratifie the unreaſonable humours and fancies of Men; and ſhould any one party of Diſſenters amongſt us get their Form of Government and Worſhip eſtabliſhed by Law, I doubt not but they would Preach to us the very ſame Doctrine, we do now to them. They would tell us that private perſons muſt bend and conform to the Laws, and not the Laws to private perſons; that it was our own fault that we were *Offended*; that our *weakneſs* proceeded from our unwilling-

unwillingness to receive instruction; that the *weak* were to be governed, not to prescribe to their Governours; that we must not expect that what was with good reason appointed and ordered should be presently abrogated or changed out of complyance with Mens foolish prejudices and mistakes. It is sufficiently known how strict and rigorous both the Presbyterians and Independents are and have been where they have had any advantage, and what little consideration or regard they have had of their *Dissenting Brethren*, tho they would have us so tender of them.

Thus much I think sufficient to shew that the Precept of Obedience to Superiours in things Lawful is more obligatory, than the Precept of avoiding *Scandal*; whence it follows that it is our duty to obey in such instances, tho *Offence* may be taken at it, because no sin is to be committed for the avoiding *Scandal*.

I might from this head further argue, that if we must not commit any sin to avoid giving *Offence*, then it is not Lawful to Separate from our Parish-Churches upon that account; because all voluntary Separation from a Church, in which nothing that is unlawful is required as a condition of Communion, is the sin of *Schism*, and that is a sin of the blackest dye and greatest guilt, noted the in *Scriptures* for *an act of carnality, a work of the Flesh and of the Devil*; for the necessity of our coming to Church, and Worshipping God in the same publick place with our Neighbours, and submitting to the Government, Discipline and Customs of that particular Church we live in, doth not depend only upon the Statutes of the Realm which enforce it, and the Command of the Civil Magistrate who requires it; but by the Law of our Religion all needless Separation or Division amongst Christians, breaking into little Parties and Factions, *from whence comes strife, envying, confusion*

and

and every evil work, is to be moſt carefully avoided, as the very bane of Chriſtianity, the rending of Chriſts body, and as utterly deſtructive not only of the peace, but of the being of a Church. So that ſhould all the Laws about Conformity and againſt Conventicles be reſcinded and voided, ſhould the Magiſtrate indulge or connive at the Separate Aſſemblies, yet ſtill this would not make our joyning with them not to be ſinful. Since to preſerve the unity of Chriſtians and one Communion, is the neceſſary duty of every member of the Church, and it can never be thought a juſtifiable thing, to cut off our ſelves from the Communion of the Church or the Body of Chriſt, out of complyance with any erring or ignorant Brethren. But the ſinfulneſs of withdrawing from the Communion of our Church, either totally or in part, hath been ſo evidently ſhewn in ſome late diſcourſes written on that ſubject, that I do deſpair of convincing thoſe of the danger of it, who can withſtand the force of all that hath been already offered to them: I only conclude thus much, that there is far more of the ſin of uncharitableneſs in ſuch Separation and Diviſion, than there can be in all the *Offence* that is imagined to be given by our Conformity.

From what I have already at large diſcourſed it plainly follows, that they are things meerly *indifferent*, not only in their own nature, but alſo in reſpect to us, in the uſe of which we are obliged to conſider the *weakneſs* of our Brethren. What is our duty muſt be done, tho *Scandal* follow it: What is evil and ſinful ought to be left undone upon the ſcore of a greater obligation, than that of *Scandal*; but now in matters, wherein our practiſe is not determined by any Command, we ought ſo to exerciſe our liberty, as if poſſible to avoid giving any *Offence* to our Bre-

thren. This is an undoubted part of that charity, which one Christian ought always to be ready to shew to another, by admonition, instruction, good example, and by the forbearance of things Lawful, at which he foreseeth his Neighbour out of *weakness* will be apt to be *Scandalized*, to endeavour to prevent his falling into any sin or mischief; and this we teach and press upon our People as much as Dissenters themselves can, in obedience to St. *Paul's* rules about *meats and days*, things neither in themselves good or evil, nor determined by any Authority, and therefore they were every way a proper instance, wherein Christians might exercise their charity and compassion one to the other; and in such cases St. *Paul* declares, that he would rather wholly forego his liberty, than by these indifferences endanger the Soul of his Brother; as in that famous place 1 *Cor.* 8. 13. *If meat make my Brother to offend, I will eat no Flesh while the World standeth, lest I make my Brother to Offend*; where by *Flesh* and *meat* is to be understood such as had been Offered unto *Idols*, which tho lawful for a Christian to eat at common meals, yet the Apostle would wholly abstain from, rather than wound the weak Conscience of a Brother. *If I by the Law of charity* (as the Reverend Bishop *Taylour* saith, *Great exemp.* p. 420) *must rather quit my own goods than suffer my Brother to perish, much rather must I quit my priviledg.* And, *We should ill die for our Brother, who will not lose a meal to prevent his sin, or change a dish to save his Soul; and if the thing be indifferent to us, yet it ought not to be indifferent to us whether our Brother live or die.*

After this manner do we profess our selves ready to do or forbear any thing in our own power, to win and gain our *Dissenting Brethren* to the Church. We grant

grant that thoſe, who conform, are obliged by this law of charity not needleſly to vex and exaſperate our *Diſſenters*, nor to do any thing which they are not bound to do, that may eſtrange them more from the Church; but to reſtrain themſelves in the uſe of that liberty God and the Laws have left them, for the ſake of peace and out of condeſcenſion to their Brethren. We dare not indeed omit any duty we owe to God, or our Superiours either in Church or State, nor can we think it fit and reaſonable, that our Apoſtolical Government, Excellent Liturgy, Orderly Worſhip of God uſed in our Church, ſhould all be preſently condemned and laid aſide, as ſoon as ſome *Weak* men take *Offence* at them; but in all other things, ſubject to our own ordering and diſpoſal, we acknowledge our ſelves bound *to pleaſe our Brother for his good unto Edification.*

I only add here, that this very rule of yielding to our Brother in things indifferent and undetermined ought to have ſome reſtrictions and limitations, ſeveral of which are mentioned by Mr. *Jeans*, whom I have ſo often named; as Firſt, That we are not to forbear theſe indifferent things, where there is only a poſſibility of *Scandal*, but where the *Scandal* conſequent is probable; for otherwiſe *we ſhould be at an utter loſs and uncertainty in all our actions, and never know what to do.* Secondly, Our *weak* Brethren muſt have ſome probable ground for their imagination that what we do is evil and ſinful, or elſe we muſt wear no Ribbands, nor put off our Hats, but come all to *Thou* and *Thee*; and for this exception he gives this ſubſtantial reaſon, *that if we are to abſtain from all indifferent things, in which another without probable ground imagineth that there is ſin, the ſervitude of Chriſtians under the Goſpel would be far greater and*

more intolerable, than that of the Jews under the Mosaical administration. Thirdly, This must be understood of indifferent things that are of no very great importance; for if it be a matter of some weight and moment, as yielding me some great profit, I must only for a while forbear it, untill my Brother is better informed. Lastly, We must not wholly betray our Christian liberty to please peevish and froward people, or to humour our Neighbour in an erroneous and superstitious opinion; for which he quotes Mr. *Calvin*, who in his Comment upon 1 *Cor.* 8. 13. tells of some *foolish Interpreters, that leave to Christians almost no use at all of things indifferent, upon pretence to avoid the Offence of Superstitious persons.*

Now tho all this is generally true, yet I think there are no certain unalterable rules to be laid down to direct our practise in this affair. For it being an exercise of charity, must be determined by the measures of prudence according to circumstances, and we may as well go about to give certain rules for Mens charity in other cases, and fix the proportion, which every Man ought to give of his estate towards the relief of the poor, as positively to tell how far a Man must deny himself in the use of indifferent things, and forego his own liberty for the sake of his Brother, and so I end this head with those words of the learned Dr. *Hammond* in his little Treatise of *Scandal: This whole matter is to be referred to the Christians pious discretion or prudence, it being free to him either to abstain, or not to abstain, from any indifferent action (remaining such) according as that piety, and that prudence shall represent it to be most charitable and beneficial to other Mens Souls.* Thus I have done with the first proposition, that nothing sinful is to be committed to avoid *Scandalizing* others.

I proceed now to the Second, that to avoid a leſs *Scandal* being taken by a few, we muſt not give a greater *Offence*, and conſequently more pernicious conſequence to a much bigger number of perſons. Now that ſuch a caſe can ever happen, wherein we muſt neceſſarily give *juſt Offence* to one ſide or other, and ſo are uncharitable, whether we do or forbear to do the ſame action; for then we ſhould be under a neceſſity of ſinning, which implies a contradiction, but yet it may and often doth happen, that ſome *weak* perſons may take *Offence* at my doing, and others be more *Offended* at my forbearing to do the ſame thing, and thus whether I do it, or not, I ſhall give *Offence*, tho not juſtly, nor through my own fault, to ſome one or other. In ſuch circumſtances therefore we are to conſider, which way is given the greater and more dangerous *Offence*, and it can never be either prudence or charity to abſtain from that, which may *Scandalize* our Brother, when by forbearance a greater and more publick *Scandal* is miniſtred to others; for in this caſe *we have greater reaſon on the account of Scandal it ſelf to do, than to forbear that action*, as all that write on this ſubject do and muſt acknowledge, and for which they uſually quote that ſaying of *Bernard*, *Prudenter advertendum eſt ſcandalum ſcandalo non emendari, &c. We are prudently to mark that one Scandal is not mended by another; which kind of emendation we ſhould practiſe, if to take off offence from one party, we give offence unto another.*

This was the occaſion of that famous Conteſt between the two great Apoſtles mentioned in the ſecond Chapter of the Epiſtle to the *Galatians*, St. *Peter* had freely converſed with the Gentile Chriſtians, and had eat with them all kind of meats; but afterwards when certain believing Jews from *Jeruſalem*, who were ſtill

Zealous.

Zealous for *Moses's* Law, and the distinction of meats, came to *Antioch*, out of fear of *Offending* them and occasioning their falling off from the Faith of *Christ* he abstained from that liberty, and withdrew from that conversation, which before he had without any scruple used; and all the believing *Jews* that were at *Antioch* followed his example, and separated themselves from their Gentile Brethren. Now St. *Paul* considering the greater *Scandal* and mischief, that would follow this pretended tenderness of St. *Peter* and his complyance with the Jewish Christians, and that it was a likely way not only to confirm them in their error, but also wholly to exclude the Gentiles from the Faith of *Christ*, and so to hinder Christian Religion being propagated in the World, he *withstood* Peter *to the face*, and chid him sharply for his imprudent behaviour, who to avoid *offending* some of the *weak* Jews did give a far greater *Offence*, and of much more dangerous consequence to the Gentile Converts, of whom the Christian Church was chiefly to consist. In this case therefore of *Scandal* we are not only to regard one side or party of Men, but as the same St. *Paul* directs us, 1 *Cor.* 10. 32. *We must give none offence neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God.*

It would swell this discourse much beyond my present design to set forth at large the many and great *Scandals*, which are given by those, who Separate from the Church of *England*; and I doubt not but if this matter was rightly considered, and we were but impartially careful to avoid giving all *Offence* to others, we should soon find our selves much more obliged upon this account of *Scandal* peaceably to communicate with our Church, than to continue divided from it. I shall hint at some few of the most obvious considerations,

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by which we may a little judge which way the greatest *Scandal* is given.

1. By leaving the Parish-Churches and joyning to the Separate Assemblies, we do mightily establish and harden (as I have before observed) those Dissenters, with whom we associate, in their sinful Separation and Erroneous persuasion of the unlawfulness of conformity; for it is but reasonable with them to judge, that we do the same things for the same reasons with themselves; and this is the true *Scandal* of our *weak Brethren*, leading them into, or confirming them in an evil course: Whereas by our forsaking them and returning to the Church we may possibly incline some, that are sincere amongst them, to consider and suspect their own ways, and enquire afresh the Arguments that prevail with us to conform, and they may begin to think that there is not so much evil in it as they have all along supposed, and thus our Authority or example may contribute something towards the gaining our Brethren.

2. Which also I have just mentioned before, whatever Sect or denomination of Dissenters we joyn with, we *Offend* all the other Sects or Parties amongst them: for they agree only in their opposition to the Church of *England*, but in other things they have their distinct Forms and Models of Worship, and Shibboleths, and they think as ill, and sometimes speak as hardly of one another, as they do of Conformists. Which would evidently appear, if any one sort of them should get the upper hand; the rest of them would all act as fiercely, and complain as loudly of that Party that did prevail, as they now do of the Church of *England*. Till therefore they all agree in one way and speak the same Language there is no reason why any one Sect of them should challenge our condescension to them,

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to their dissatisfaction and *Offence* of all the other Dissenters, who have as good a right to this Plea of *weakness* as themselves.

4. Hereby great *Offence* is given to all those who do not come; for this Separation from the Church is a publick condemning of the Government, Orders, Discipline or Doctrine of our Church, and is apt to breed scruples and perplexities in well meaning, but less knowing members of it, and by degrees produces a distast or dislike of our Worship, and plainly hinders the efficacy of the ordinances of Christ as administred in our Church, whilest it creates prejudices in people against them as impure and corrupt; and why there should not be a due regard had to those many, who are *Offended* at our Dissenters Conventicle Worship, as well as of those, who are said to be *Scandalized* by our Church service, I cannot at all guess. I shall only say here, that irreverent sitting at the receiving the Sacrament of the Lords Supper, Mens unmannerly wearing their Hats in time of Divine Worship, and oftentimes putting them off but half way at their Prayers, their indecent postures and antick gestures at their devotions, the extravagancies and follies (not to say worse) some of them are guilty of in their extemporary effusions, the strange uncouth Metaphors and Phrases they use in their Preaching; in a word, the slovenly performance of Divine Worship amongst the Dissenters is much more *Scandalous*, then all the Ceremonies of our Church can ever be.

4. Consider the *Scandal* that is hereby given to Magistrates and our Superiours, by bringing their Laws and Authority into contempt; concerning which the forenamed Mr. *Jeans* in his first Edition of his Discourse about *Abstinence from all Appearance of Evil*, hath these words, *If*, saith he, *it were better to be thrown*

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into the bottom of the Sea with a Millſtone about ones Neck, than to offend a little one, a poor and illiterate Artizan, what expreſſion ſhall we then find anſwerable to the heinouſneſs of a Scandal given to a Pious Magiſtrate, to a Religious Prince, to a Parliament, and Convocation, to an whole Church and Commonwealth?

5. By this Separation from the Church, great *Scandal* is given to the Papiſts; not that they are diſpleaſed at it; they are not indeed offended in that ſenſe, but this ſerves wonderfully to harden them in their falſe and Idolatrous Worſhip; it increaſeth their confidence, that their Church is the only true Church of Chriſt, becauſe amongſt them only is found Peace and Unity; and this is a mighty temptation to many wavering Chriſtians to turn Papiſts: inſomuch that Mr. *Baxter* hath told us, that *Thouſands have been drawn to Popery, or confirmed in it by this Argument already*, and he ſaith of himſelf, that *he is perſuaded, that all the Arguments elſe in* Bellarmin, *and all other Books that ever were written, have not done ſo much to make Papiſts in* England, *as the multitude of Sects among our ſelves.* This indeed is a great *Scandal* to our Proteſtant Religion, and is that which the Papiſts are on all occaſions ſo forward to object againſt us, and hit us in the teeth with; and by our hearty uniting with the Church of *England*, we may certainly wreſt out of their hands the moſt dangerous weapon they uſe againſt the Reformation.

6. This tends to the *Scandal* of Religion in general. It prejudiceth men againſt it as an uncertain thing, a matter of endleſs diſpute and debate; it makes ſome Men utterly reject it as conſiſting moſtly in little trifles and niceties about which they obſerve the greateſt noiſe and contention to be made or as deſtructive of the Publick Peace of Societies, when they ſee what

dangerous feuds and quarrels commence from our Religious Differences, and all the disorder and confusion that they have caused here in *England*, shall by some be charged upon Christianity it self.

Thus our causeless Separations and Divisions open a wide door to Atheisme, and all kind of Prophaneness and Irreligion: After this manner it was of old, and always will be, where there are Parties in Religion, and one contends that their Separation is lawful, and the other that it is unlawful, the Common people soon become doubtful and ready to forsake all Religion.

I might add here, that such Separations necessarily occasion breach of Charity; they beget implacable enmities and animosities: Hence cometh strife, emulation, envying, one Party continually endeavouring to overtop the other, watching for one anothers halting, rejoycing in one anothers sins and misfortunes, constant undermining one another, to the disturbance of the Publick Government, and endangering the Civil Peace; of all which and much more than I can now mention the present distracted condition of our Nation is so great and undenyable an evidence, that there need no more words to shew the mischiefs that attend such Divisions; and now let any one judge, whether the Peace and Unity of the Church, the maintaining of Charity amongst Brethren, the keeping out Popery, and Atheism, the preservation of the Authority of the Magistrate, and quiet of the Society we are Members of, the honour and credit of our Religion. Lastly, Whether giving *Offence* to all both Conformists and Nonconformists, those only excepted of our own particular Sect and Division, nay *Scandalizing* them also in the true and proper sense of *Scandal*, be not of far greater and more weighty consideration, than

than the fear of displeasing or grieving some few *weak* dissatisfied Brethren; *Wo to those, by whom Offences come.* But these things I have very lightly touched, because they have been the subject of many Sermons and discourses lately published.

To sum up all I have said,

Since they, who dissent from the Church of *England*, are not such *weak* persons as St. *Paul* all along describes and provides for; since we cannot by our Conformity really *Scandalize* or *Offend* them in that sense, in which the Scriptures use those words; since tho we did give *Offence* to them by our Conformity, yet that would not excuse us from doing our Duty, and by refusing to Conform we should do both them and others greater hurt and mischief; I think I may safely conclude, that *there cannot lie any obligation upon any private Christian (as the case now stands amongst us) to absent himself from his Parish-Church, or to forbear the use of the Forms of Prayer or Ceremonies by Law appointed, for fear of Offending his weak Brethren.*

I end all with one word of Advice. First, to those who are not convinced of the lawfulness of Conformity. Secondly, to those who are satisfied that it is lawful.

1. To those who are not convinced of the lawfulness of Conformity, and therefore urge so hard that they ought not to be *Offended* by us. I would beseech them that they would take some care and make some Conscience to avoid giving any needless *Offence* to those of the Church of *England*, and this cannot but be thought a reasonable request, since they require all others to be so tender of them. They ought not therefore to meet in such numbers, nor at the same time at which we assemble to Worship God in our publick Churches. Let them not affront our Service and Com-

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mon-Prayers, nor revile our Biſhops and Miniſters, nor put on their Hats when at any time they chance to be preſent at our Service in our Churches, nor talk nor read in Books, nor make ſour faces at our Devotions, and when they obſerve theſe and other the like rules, they may then with a better grace (tho with little reaſon) find fault with our Conformity as *Offenſive* to them. I would be loth to ſay any thing, that ſhould exaſperate or provoke any of the Diſſenters whoſe ſatisfaction I deſign: I very well know their *weakneſs*, that they cannot endure to be told of their faults. However I muſt tell them, that there are no ſort of perſons in the Chriſtian World profeſſing Religion and Godlineſs, that have done ſuch *Scandalous* things, as ſome of thoſe who call themſelves Proteſtant Diſſenters. I forbear to name particulars.

2. As for thoſe who are ſatisfied concerning the lawfulneſs of Conformity, I would deſire them ſo to order their return to the Church, as not to give any juſt *Offence* to thoſe whom they forſake; that is to ſay, that they would do it heartily and ſincerely, that all may ſee they Conformed with a willing mind, being perſuaded that it is their duty ſo to do, and not meerly to ſatisfie the Law, or to ſave their Purſes, or to get into an Office, or to capacitate them to Vote or the like. For ſuch a kind of Conformity, as ſome practiſe, and call *Occaſional Communion*, which is coming to Church and Sacrament to ſerve a turn, is truly *Scandalous* to all good Men of what perſuaſion ſoever.

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